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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000128

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: NBPP: GERMANS DO NOT IMPRESS DURING
FOLLOW-UP MEETING

REF: BEIRUT 00094

Classified By: Charge d'Affairs William Grant for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) European Commission officials in Lebanon harshly criticized German management of the Northern Border Pilot Program (NBPP). The EC insisted that the Germans extend their mandate on the NBPP for an additional three months and outlined a clear set of expectations for achievements. However, a subsequent meeting with Embassy officers failed to demonstrate a noticeable change in either attitude or approach, with the Germans continuing to insist that it is not their job to coordinate cross-cutting donor issues. The Common Border Force (CBF) rounded out the week with their first successful operation and the arrest of three suspected smugglers. There are concerns, however, that they are being sent in the field before all training and equipment installations have been completed. End Summary.

EC Calls German Team Onto the Carpet

12. (C) On January 23, Head of the European Commission Delegation in Lebanon, Patrick Laurent, convened a meeting in his office which included the German Ambassador to Lebanon, the British Ambassador to Lebanon, Head of the German Project Implementation Unit (PIU) for the Northern Border Pilot Project, and other members of the German, British and EU teams who have been working on this project. Both UK and EU contacts confirm that Laurent was extremely harsh in his criticism of German stewardship to date, calling it one of the most unorganized projects he has seen in his entire career. The German Ambassador still "didn't get it," according to others in the room. He continued to extol the virtues of the German management team, although - according to UK sources - at least General Stoltz, the project leader, seemed to take the criticism on board.

13. (C) EU and UK contacts told us that a number of decisions were taken during the meeting with Laurent:

-- The Germans, with financial support from the European Commission, will extend their mandate for an extra three months through June 2008.

-- Laurent spelled out clear expectations for this additional

time period. He wants the CBF to progress through EU classifications of "Bronze, Silver, and Gold" levels of capacity for border management.

-- The date for a full launch of the NBPP has been pushed back from February 1 to a more realistic March 2008 date.

-- EU and British colleagues told the German Ambassador and General Stoltz to turn their full attention to the successful implementation of the NBPP. The Germans were told, in no uncertain terms, not to even think about ambitious proposals for expansion to the eastern border (reftel) until they had produced a success story on the NBPP.

¶4. (C) During separate debriefs of this meeting, working level contacts urged Embassy representatives to "hear out" the Germans, who had asked to meet with the DCM and Special Assistant the following day. EU and UK colleagues said that a second-in-command for the German PIU had arrived January 19 and had put together a strategic plan to address long-standing donor requests for coordination which they viewed as extremely positive. Fellow donor representatives advised EmbOffs remain open to German plans for change. "We think they want to surprise you with this new plan during their meeting with you. Sit back and let them dazzle you," they advised.

Surprise...Germans Fail to Dazzle

¶5. (C) On January 24, German DCM Irene Plank and General Carl Stoltz called on the DCM and Special Assistant. During the 90 minute meeting, the German team never once raised the new

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plan to improve coordination which had been presented during the EC meeting the day before. In fact, some of the same language emerged from General Stoltz that had been causing dismay among donors during the previous months:

-- "My mission from Berlin is not to actually ensure that there is a successful CBF on the Northern border. My team and I are only here to provide an assessment of Lebanese capabilities."

-- "My government assumed that donors would turn over equipment in a 'turn key' manner - ready to go. It is not my job to micro-manage the details of problems that arise."

These comments and the failure to present a "new" plan were extremely discouraging developments.

¶6. (C) However, there were some positive comments made during the meeting:

-- The German DCM assured EmbOffs that the Germans had never had any plans to end their involvement in the NBPP in March 2008. (Note: This contradicts what Stoltz had been telling donor reps in weekly meetings. End Note.)

-- The German DCM also said that they were in "no rush" to begin operations to the east and Stoltz went into great detail about the GOL commitments that would be needed before such an expansion could occur. Referring to the December presentation which laid out proposals for a December 2008 start date for eastern operations (reftel), Plank said that the Germans merely wanted to "express the need to maintain international momentum after the end of the NBPP."

-- Stoltz offered to travel to consult with Embassy once per week to assure fluid communication. DCM stressed the importance of using the Daytron subcontractor to answer all technical questions about donated U.S. goods.

Common Border Force Faces Its First Test

¶7. (C) On January 25, the CBF had their first operational contact with what turned out to be a major smuggling gang from the area of Wadi Khaled, characterized by some as "the center of smuggling in the north." During an attempt to halt a truck known to be carrying smuggled fuel, three CBF were attacked by locals throwing stones. The vehicles sustained minor damage and the CBF retreated before the situation escalated. After regrouping, they returned to the same area with three patrol teams and an estimated 50 person support unit from the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Northern Brigade. (Note: UK contractors on site were told the LAF wanted to make very clear that it would not tolerate any attacks on CBF personnel. End Note.) In a house-to-house search that followed, three arrests were made -- although it was also reported that locals tried to block a road near Deir Ammar to prevent the transportation of the prisoners to the northern city of Tripoli. A fourth CBF vehicle was also surrounded during the return to the scene and stoned by locals. CBF personnel had to fire their weapons in the air to restore order and retreat.

¶8. (C) These events occurred at the same time as the 1/25 bombing in Beirut that killed of ISF Captain Wissam Eid, so there was not a great deal of media attention to this minor skirmish. UK contractors noted that no German members of the PIU called to check in on the status of the operation, despite having been briefed at the beginning of the maneuver. (Note: Many phone circuits and systems were clogged on January 25 in the aftermath of the bombing. End Note.)

¶9. (C) UK and Danish contractors noted that there is indeed a will to fight smuggling among the CBF members and many seemed to relish this first foray into action. However, it is important to note that some training and equipment installation remains. UK contractors commented that the March start date decided upon during the EC meeting mentioned above must be transmitted to the field. They recommend keeping the troops closer to the Tripoli base until all equipment, including USG-provided secure radios, are fully functional.

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Comment

¶10. (C) While we had high hopes that the EC meeting had produced meaningful change in the German approach to their role in the NBPP, this was not evident during a meeting with EmbOffs the following day. In the meantime, UK Embassy representatives and contractors continue to produce impressive and thoughtful suggestions for solutions to the current problems and also expansion to the eastern border. If the Germans don't "take ownership" of the NBPP and its success or failure, post continues to believe that they should not take the lead on future operations for the eastern border. Furthermore, while the will and bravery demonstrated by the CBF during their first engagement was impressive, it is doubtful that a momentum for an eastern border security project could be maintained without high-level political and financial commitments from the Government of Lebanon. End Comment.
GRANT